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19 Housekeepers' Chat.

Tues., Oct. 16, 1928

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "It's time to Plant Bulbs." Information from W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, U.S.D.A.

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The best time to see W. R. B., the garden adviser, is early in the morning. He says that since the days are getting so short, the only way he can get his fall gardening in, is to do it before breakfast.

When I called on W. R. B. the other morning, he was planting tulip bulbs. He is very fond of tulips,--says they are among the most satisfactory of early spring flowers. W. R. B. explained that tulip bulbs can remain in the ground all summer, but it's really better to lift them, after the stems have all died down, dry the bulbs for a time in a cool, dry, place, on screens, or in open baskets, and plant them again in a new bed, about this time of year.

I love tulips. Next spring I want to have the gayest tulip bed in the neighborhood. That's the real reason I made my early morning call on the garden adviser.

"Please tell me," I said, "what kind of soil is best for tulips?"

"Oh, tulips will grow on almost any kind of soil," said my friend, "just a good garden loam is all right. Of course, they will do better on a good rich soil, than on a poor soil. I generally manure the ground where I am going to plant my tulip bulbs early in the spring, and grow other crops on it during the summer. Then in the fall, when I plant my bulbs, I spade the ground deeply, working in just a little bone meal as I prepare the soil. I mix this very thoroughly with the soil, breaking up all lumps of soil, and working it fine and loose, to a depth of seven or eight inches."

"How deep do you plant the tulip bulbs, and how far apart should they be set?" I asked next.

"Plant the bulbs four or five inches deep, and about eight inches apart, in each direction. You see, after I get my bed all prepared, I place the bulbs on top of the ground, just where I want them planted. Then, with a narrow, long-bladed trowel, I make openings and set the bulbs in these openings, keeping them right side up. Another way is to mark the places for the bulbs by making little holes with a pointed stick, then use the trowel, and set the bulbs as I have already suggested."

"Do you plant jonquil and narcissus bulbs in the same way?" I asked.

"Yes, practically the same. It pays to put jonquils and narcissus in fairly deep, and they need rich soil."

I noticed that W. R. B. had not planted all of his tulip bulbs, so I asked him what he intended to do with those he had left over.

"Plant them in pots," said he, "and have them for winter flowers."

That sounded interesting. I told my friend that I'd help him plant his bulbs, if he'd take time to tell me how to grow tulips, hyacinths, and narcissus for winter blooming in the house.

"It's a bargain, Aunt Sammy," said W. R. B. "First, you want some loamy soil, in which to plant the bulbs. Then you want a supply of small fern pans, or pots about six or seven inches in diameter, and five or six inches deep. Before you plant the bulbs, place a little piece of broken pot, or a small flat stone, over the drainage hole in the bottom of the pot, then partly fill the pot with soil. Place three to five bulbs in each pot, fill the pots level full with soil, and firm the soil slightly over the bulbs. Tulips, hyacinths, narcissus--in fact, almost any kind of bulb--can be planted in this manner, for winter flowering in the house.

"In the case of hyacinths, it pays to place not more than three bulbs in a pot, or, if the bulbs are very large, one will be better.

"The next step in the care of these bulbs is to prepare a place in one end of the coldframe, dig out the soil to a depth of three or four inches, set the pots in this space, touching each other, and fill in between them with sifted coal ashes, or with light sandy soil. Cover them to a depth of three or four inches with the sifted coal ashes, or with sand. Water the bed moderately, and keep it from drying out during the late fall and early winter. If the bulbs freeze, it won't hurt them. The only difficulty that you will have will be in getting the pots out of the bed when frozen, but you can likely catch a time when there is not much frost, and move them to the house.

"By taking a few of the pots into the house at intervals you can have a succession of bloom during the early part of the winter. Begin, say, the first of December--take a few of the pots into the house and you may have flowers for the holidays, or at least early in January. We call this forcing the bulbs."

"What can be done with the bulbs after they are forced?" I asked.

"Leave them in the pots," said W. R. B., "and keep them slightly watered, until they have made considerable growth. Then in the spring, just as soon as the ground thaws, knock the ball of earth with the bulbs in it out of the pots, and plunge the ball of earth into the ground outdoors. This will give the bulbs a chance to ripen, and they may be saved for planting outdoors next year. However, they are never quite so good as new bulbs."

"Is it true," I asked, "that the petals of tulips should never be allowed to fall on the ground, but should be gathered and burned, before they drop?"

"Yes, Aunt Sammy, that is a good practice, because the petals often carry a disease which injures the leaves of the tulips, and affects their growth, following blooming. You see, after the blossoms fall, the leaves remain green, and the bulbs go on growing for some time. It is during this period that they store the reserve upon which they produce blossoms the following season. That's why it is not wise, in cutting tulips or any of the bulbs, for that matter, to remove the foliage, because the bulb depends upon its leaves to store up energy for next year's blooming. Any more questions, Aunt Sammy?"

"Just one more," I said, "and then I'll let you go to breakfast. Your wife is making hot cakes and frying bacon--I smell them. My question is this: When you plant bulbs in the ground, in the fall, is it necessary to cover or mulch the bulbs, during the winter?"

"The answer," said W. R. B., "is that it is a good plan to top-dress the beds, with a layer of well rotted compost, about 2 or 3 weeks after the bulbs are set. This protects them during the winter, and at the same time is a great help in the growing of good bulbs for next year's planting. You see, it does not pay to grow bulbs just for one year's flowering. They should be kept growing year after year, and while you may lose a few, and while it pays to buy some new ones each year, you can generally save the most of the old ones in good condition."

I thanked W. R. B. for his information, and told him I was going to plant some bulbs late this afternoon.

"I'll drop over and help you," said he. "By the way, Aunt Sammy--have you had breakfast? Come on in, and eat some of Mrs. B's hot cakes, with maple syrup."

Which I did, and the hot cakes were so good I asked Mrs. W. R. B. for her recipe. Some time I'll give it to you.

Be sure to have your pencils and Radio Records ready tomorrow morning, for menu and recipe.

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